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ABSTRACT

The difficulties experienced by part-time faculty members are discussed, and some benefits of part-time teaching are identified. Among the problems faced by part-time staff are per-course salaries, lack of college-paid benefits, job insecurity, and invisibility on campus. If the part-time teaching position is a primary source of income and career satisfaction, the teacher may be discouraged by exclusion from faculty governance, from opportunities for professional growth, and from possibilities for recognition and reward. On the other hand, part-time teaching can be a challenge if it is a break from a full-time job, a chance to stay in touch with the classroom, an opportunity for important professional connections, and a supplementary source of income and career satisfaction. Part-timers need to be treated like colleagues, paid fairly, and given adequate encouragement and opportunity for professional growth. It is possible that part-timers' low wages and hard work covering introductory courses may make it possible for the academic profession to survive the current demographic crisis. (SW)

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THE RICHNESS OF LANGUAGE AND THE POVERTY OF PART-TIMERS: IMPACT AND INVISIBILITY

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After having spent the past two years researching and writing a book on Part-time Academic Employment in the Humanities for MLA, I can't quite figure out how to boil those two years down into ten minutes. Sometimes I feel that the part-time situation is one of those great mysteries before which mere mortals like myself should maintain a respectful silence. However, although ten minutes of silence might be welcome at an MLA Convention, it wouldn't do much to relieve the frustrations I've felt as a part-timer or to give the overview of the part-time faculty issue that I'm supposed to give here tonight.

The title of my talk suggests an alternative methodology--that of paradox. It is indeed paradoxical that our glorious profession, worthy of such high honor and demanding such great discipline, should so depend on inglorious and ignoble working conditions for so many; it is also paradoxical that those people most frequently teaching basic language and literature courses to first year students, teachers thus capable of having an impact on almost every college student in the United States, should be so invisible and expendable in their various institutions.

Wayne Booth, in his 1982 MLA Presidential Address in Los Angeles, calls this paradox our worst scandal.

At what point does our profession have the best chance to serve critical understanding, to serve it in such a way as to ensure that the great world understands what we are up to, at all levels? Obviously in the beginning years, in the required courses, in Litcomp and introductory language courses.... every congressman, every business leader, and every member of our White House gangs, all of our teachers have passed through our required courses. But where were we when they passed? Since most of them were not English majors, they met only those we delegated to teach college beginners--mainly our underpaid part-timers, our exploited TA's (many of them just out of college themselves), at best our assistant professors, who are told,

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sometimes without even an effort at euphemism, that the road to promotion is not to teach well but to get that book out....The great public fears or despises us because we hire a vast army of underpaid flunkies to teach the so-called service courses, so that we can gladly teach, in our advanced courses, those precious souls who survive the gauntlet. Give us lovers and we will love them, but do not expect us to study courtship.

Booth is sensitive to the inequities in the present system, but his primary emphasis is on the resulting impact on students: such junior faculty are rarely given adequate orientation, supervision, or recognition. And although Booth grants that "they do sometimes manage, miraculously, to frustrate our efforts to destroy them and their students," he feels that overall the students are shortchanged and alienated from language and literature courses for the rest of their academic careers.

While memories of my own first semester of teaching tend to reinforce Wayne Booth's concern here -- I was called in to teach comp to a section of what turned out to be very forgiving freshman the day after fall term had started, having passed my PhD oral exam the week before and having never taught a class anywhere in anything but swimming -- my more recent memories of conversations with part-timers from San Diego to Philadelphia lead me to suspect that most freshmen suffer less than their instructors do from this unfortunate system. The bright, argumentative philosopher teaching several courses at each of three different institutions in Southern California was taking computer courses on his free evenings and publishing regularly, hoping to escape the insecurity, the hours of commuting, and his \$12000 a year salary. The soft-spoken woman graduate student in Philadelphia, taking the train north three days a week into Bucks County to teach in the morning, returning to Philly to teach in the city in the afternoon, and spending two days a week southwest of the city teaching all day at a state college, was only able to make ends meet because one of the three institutions gave her some benefits along with her part-time pay. She was

struggling to finish her dissertation, hoping a PhD in hand would help her find a full-time position.

I've met administrators who actually maintained that such part-timers were exploiting institutions of higher education, but my impression was one of meticulous scheduling, great self-discipline, piles of papers to grade, genuine concern for students, and a love of teaching. Nothing but a love of teaching could keep such energetic and talented people in such positions.

The various available studies of part-time faculty don't agree on why part-timers do what they do; the studies all have different emphases. Tuckman's study for the AAUP focuses on the many different types of part-timers and the multitude of motives for part-time teaching. His research revealed that most part-timers were men who had full-time jobs elsewhere and who were content with their part-time teaching. Tuckman emphasized the economic realities of the present situation, the role of supply and demand.

David Leslie's book, Part-Time Faculty in American Higher Education, is thorough, informative, and geared toward administrators -- it attempts to determine when the use of part-time teachers is judicious, enriching, and legally safe. Leslie also points out that the hidden administrative costs of extensive part-time employment, turnover, and supervision are great and that therefore the overuse of part-timers might prove financially irresponsible in the long run. Leslie, like Tuckman, concentrated on the majority of contented, moonlighting part-timers.

The Ohio study of part-timers by Yang and Zak, Part-Time Faculty Employment in Ohio: A Statewide Study, gives information on part-timers by discipline that hadn't been available before and analyzed the disparities in expectations and assumptions between administrators and part-timers,

particularly the assumption (or hope) among part-timers that their part-time teaching might lead to full-time teaching positions. Yang and Zak revealed that the two fields using part-timers most heavily -- business and the humanities (primarily English) -- depend on two very different constituencies. Business part-timers are usually male and employed full-time elsewhere. Part-timers in English are usually female with no full-time jobs elsewhere; if they do have other employment, it is most likely to be in teaching, not in business or other professions.

My own study focuses entirely on such part-time faculty in the humanities, those for whom their part-time teaching is their career.

It's been said that academics will do more work for less money than any other professionals; combine that with some women's willingness to put their own careers on hold temporarily for the sake of husband or children, and a dangerous situation results. One woman had left tenured positions in public school systems and community colleges behind to move when her husband was transferred and promoted; she had left one position as a department chair to find herself teaching freshman comp for a low per-course salary, required to reapply for her own part-time position every year, and required to undergo frequent demeaning evaluations semester after semester -- so that in the end she felt much more scrutinized, graded, and examined than any student. At an age when she should have been enjoying the respect due an experienced, dedicated professional, she was insecure, peripheral, and expendable because of the geographic disruption of her career.

Yet staying in one place is no guarantee of advancement; another woman has been teaching nineteen years at the same small private college, part-time. In spite of her relative stability in a world of academic upheaval, she waits nervously each summer to see if a contract for the following year

will arrive. She works in almost total isolation in an interdisciplinary department staffed entirely by part-timers. No one visits her classes or reads her numerous publications; she is eager for evaluation and recognition that never comes. She started out at this institution full-time, left to earn her doctorate, returned a married woman to be offered only part-time work, and then continued part-time while she bore and reared two daughters. Divorced now with teen-age daughters to support, her per-course salary, her lack of college-paid benefits, her job insecurity, and her invisibility on campus hurt deeply. Only her work beyond the campus--on editorial boards, conferences, research, publications--and her contact with devoted previous students (some of whom have returned to their alma mater in full-time, tenure-track positions!) make her feel like a professional.

Horror stories abound -- especially in New York City -- of part-timers getting last minute calls and cancellations or of full-time positions being discontinued and full-timers replacing themselves as part-timers on per course salaries (see, for example, WPA Journal, Fall 1981). One-year full-time positions are regularly advertised in the MLA Job List and teachers take such positions year after year, moving back and forth across the country, hoping for the one position that might lead to something permanent. Three-year terminal positions are advertised, a job description suggesting that you would save the employing institution a lot of unpleasantness if you could somehow manage to die or at least dematerialize after your three-year stint.

Lest it be assumed that solutions are simple -- i.e., the elimination of all part-time or non-standard appointments -- let me hasten to add that part-time positions are ideal in some situations. In my own case, as long

as part-time teaching was my primary source of income and career satisfaction, I was saddened and discouraged by my exclusion from faculty governance, from opportunities for professional growth, from possibilities for recognition and reward. Suddenly, now that part-time teaching is a refreshing challenge, a break from my full-time job, a chance to stay in touch with the classroom, an opportunity for important professional connections, and a supplementary source of income and career satisfaction, I enjoy it with few reservations. I would have no time now for participation in faculty governance even if it were offered to me (though I admit I would like the choice to be mine) and the lack of fringe benefits and tenure eligibility is not devastating under my present circumstances, though it once was. Thus, it would seem that occasional part-time teaching for those who are employed full-time elsewhere involves few inequities and can, as David Leslie argues, bring unusual and otherwise unavailable and unaffordable expertise to a campus and strengthen college curriculums -- if such part-timers are employed judiciously and adequately screened, oriented, supported, and supervised.

Part-time teaching can also be ideal for those who have no other full-time employment as long as the part-timers involved are treated like colleagues, paid fairly, and given adequate encouragement and opportunity for professional growth (like distinguished teaching awards for part-time faculty, support for attendance at conferences, and eligibility for research leaves or sabbaticals). The two women who teach part-time in the foreign language department at Carleton and who are paid pro-rated salaries, are eligible for tenure and benefits, leaves and sabbaticals, feel valued by their full-time colleagues and are justly compensated for their work. The woman who teaches technical and scientific writing part-time at MIT finds that part-time teaching allows her the time she needs for

her children and for her own writing and research; again, it is MIT's enlightened policy that allows her full faculty status, pro-rated salary and benefits, and eligibility for tenure.

My research into part-time faculty policies revealed many institutions that permitted at least some of their part-time faculty to be considered "regular" part-timers -- that is, with credentials equal to those of full-time faculty, with long-term commitment to college teaching as a profession, with the additional responsibilities of committee meetings or advisees (usually pro-rated), and therefore with pro-rated salaries, benefits, perks, and often with eligibility for tenure. But, as one might suspect, the list of such forward-looking institutions tends, with few exceptions, to read like a list of the wealthier colleges and universities in the U.S.: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Wesleyan, Columbia, Oberlin, Wellesley, Smith, Bryn Mawr, Mt. Holyoke, Carleton, MIT, Stanford, Cornell. Less likely were state universities -- Ball State, Michigan State, University of Tennessee, University of Wisconsin, University of Iowa -- and smaller private liberal arts colleges -- Hood, Central College, Dickinson, Franklin and Marshall, Grinnell, Hamline, Ripon, St. John's, Wheaton. Very rare indeed was the community college that allowed for different categories of part-time faculty and paid any of their part-timers pro-rated salaries.

However, the other side of this story, the institutions without such generous policies, is about worried administrators and senior faculty facing the gloomy prospect of dwindling enrollments, tighter budgets, hiring freezes, and layoffs, even sometimes of tenured faculty. Is it fairer for an administrator who knows from the start that a junior faculty member can have no long-term future at her institution to advertise only

part-time or one-year or three-year appointments? or should all appointments be tenure-track and full-time, even if the institution knows it cannot afford to grant tenure to anyone in the next decade? Which approach is more humane and more honest?

Institutions will always be heartless when it comes to their own survival. Individuals will be sacrificed if such sacrifice is necessary to keep the institution afloat. The evidence is clear, particularly from David Leslie's book, that part-timers and short-term faculty are hired to protect the positions of tenured faculty and that part-time and non-tenured faculty will be the first to go when funds disappear. Part-time positions do not usually lead to full-time, tenure-track positions.

Recently, my advice to unhappy fellow part-timers has been to get out. I've seen it as my role to remind them how bright and talented they are and how easy it would be for them to make the transition to the business world. True, the rhythm of the business year is quite different from that of the academic year; there is no long holiday for Christmas or Easter or summer. There is no tenure, no guarantee at all of academic freedom or continued employment -- although there may be a very strong emotional security, a knowledge that you are vital to a company's well-being, that few academics seem to feel these days. There is rarely support for the kind of scholarly work most of us love; but then again, there can be flexibility, leaves can be arranged, and schedules may allow more time on a regular basis for reading and writing than the nightly grading of composition papers ever did.

But, a week ago I received two letters on the same day from two sides of the country -- the philosopher in California I mentioned earlier and the English professor in Pennsylvania who had left several tenured teaching jobs behind to follow her husband from promotion to promotion. The

philosopher was full of good news; starting January he was moving to a tenure-track philosophy position at a university. His long list of publications and his computer training had both been essential in gaining him his new position. But the English professor was discouraged; the fringe benefits she had enjoyed as a part-timer were being eroded. She now has to re-apply to be on the pension plan every September; new part-timers are no longer allowed access to fringe benefits at all. And because the medical plan premiums increased drastically in the last few months (an increase the full-time faculty did not notice because for them the increased costs in coverage were absorbed by the college), she is earning substantially less this year than last.

I held these two letters in my hand and wondered, what should I say? Hang in there--your chance at a part- or full-time position with honor will come? Or, get out now while the getting's good?

I used to say that the dignity of the profession was at stake, that if full-time faculty in literature and language so clearly undervalued what their junior and/or part-time colleagues did, the public could hardly be expected to appreciate it. I was in good company. Wayne Booth in his 1982 presidential address had asked, "Is there any wonder, then, that our top administrators, observing our behavior, echo our contempt for those [introductory literature and language] courses, and finally for all that we do? Nothing we say could counterbalance the contemptuous message about Litcomp given by the practices I have described." Should we wonder, then, that funding is cut for the humanities, that English and foreign language professors are asked to teach overloads or to drop upper-level courses entirely to staff freshman composition and basic languages?

But it may be that rather than destroying the status of the

profession, our overuse of part-timers may be doing just the opposite -- it may be that part-time and short-term faculty are helping to preserve the dignity and status of the profession during these hard times, that they are being and will continue to be sacrificed so that senior professors can go on teaching two graduate courses a semester and write up the results of their research. Part-timers' low wages and hard work covering introductory courses -- and doing a better job of it under the circumstances than anyone has a right to expect -- may be the very things that make it possible for the profession as we know it to survive the current demographic crisis. Only a lucky few will make it during these bad years into the ranks of the blessed while the majority will give up or be cast aside.

Does this make tenured or even tenure-track full-timers the enemy? Certainly there are full-time faculty who fear for their own jobs and for their own favorite graduate or upper-level seminars and who therefore do little to fight for the rights of part-time faculty to better pay or more stimulating courses.

Yet there are many full-timers whose own career hopes have been dashed against the rocky realities of the 1980's, disillusioned and overworked senior professors, seldom able to teach courses in their specialities or to find time for their own writing and research amid heavy teaching and administrative workloads, and yet painfully aware of the decisions they have to make about junior colleagues. Such professors are caught between the budget cuts of inflexible administrators and the struggling hopes of talented junior faculty who represent to their senior colleagues the lost future of the profession.

So where are the villains in this dismal scenario? Neither administrators under seige, nor overworked full-timers, nor those struggling to enter the profession, nor those willing to teach part-time

for whatever private reasons, nor the college-age students who never managed to be born eighteen years ago can be blamed. And what are the solutions? -- eliminating all part-time and non-standard appointments, a practice that might cause some institutions to close their doors this month or cut back on vital programs? paying all or some part-timers pro-rated salaries, allowing them fringe benefits, eligibility for tenure, a faculty vote, while resources are so scarce that many short-term full-timers lack these things? evaluating part-timers more or evaluating them less? demanding that they attend training and orientation while yet being unable to reimburse them fairly for such investments of time?

Oddly enough, the existing studies of part-time faculty, all of which come at the issue from so many different perspectives, show remarkable agreement in certain recommendations. First, because there are so many different categories of part-timers, different part-timers should be treated differently; and second, for the sake of students, institutions, and part-time faculty themselves, part-timers must be treated as professional colleagues, hired in a more regular fashion, allowed opportunities for research and growth, supported by access to office space, secretarial help, campus facilities, and compensated more fairly. However, none of these studies tell institutions on the verge of bankruptcy how to find time or money to accomplish these things.

I haven't managed to say much that you don't already know and I feel as if I've unsaid everything that I've said. This is an oddly Zen sort of speech -- a speech that is no speech at all. I seem literally to be speechless. But all I have learned in two years is the complexity of the situation. In specific cases at specific institutions I can sometimes see clearly what needs to be done. But when I look at the whole, I fall into

silence.

My emotions, however, are always with the part-time teacher. I want to say so much -- I want to say, "Get out. You are immeasurably intelligent, responsible, hard-working, energetic, and articulate. The business world is eager for people like you and has meaningful challenges to offer. It's easier to make the transition than you think."

But then I must also contradict myself. If you do get out, be prepared to weep when Wayne Booth talks at MLA Conventions about teaching critical understanding to undergraduates; when Booth talks about Malcolm X learning to read in prison and, through reading, having his first real taste of freedom; when Booth talks about his insane love of literature and his eagerness to join other minds through language. Nothing else will ever come close and when you leave this glorious profession you will long to return to it for the rest of your life -- whether or not its communal richness means personal poverty and despair for many who love it best.